

Budget Proposals 2024/25: Reduce opening hours at Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs)

Consultation Summary Report

Why did we consult?

The council is facing unprecedented financial pressures. From historically high inflation increasing contract costs, to rising housing costs and through to large increases in cost and demand in supporting our most vulnerable residents with social care, the council has some major cost increases.

In 2024/25, we need to find £14.2 million in savings or income generation. This figure is based on the assumption that Council Tax increases by 4.99% overall in line with previous government referendum limits. We have identified £12.2 million worth of savings and income generation, of which approximately £1.75 million comes from proposals that require public consultation.

Through extensive internal discussions and meetings with our service providers, we've identified 10 proposals.

For more information please visit <https://www.westberks.gov.uk/balancing-our-budget>

Approach

We published all the public facing proposals on our website on 27 November 2023 with feedback requested by midnight on 11 January 2024.

Respondents were directed to a central index pageⁱ, which outlined the overall background to the exercise, and provided links to each of the individual proposals on our Consultation and Engagement Hubⁱⁱ.

Each individual page included further details on the specifics of what the proposal contained and what we thought the impact might be, along with any other elements we'd considered. Feedback was then invited through an online survey, and hard copies of the proposal documents and surveys were made available on request.

Services to add any other specific engagement exercises here e.g. any in-person conversations.

As well as publishing the consultations on our website, we also emailed members of the West Berkshire Community Panel (around 2,500 people), local stakeholder charities, representative groups and partner organisations notifying them of the exercise and inviting their contributions. Service Directors contacted those organisations directly affected prior to them being made publicly available.

Finally, we issued a press release on 28 November 2023, and further publicised our consultations through our social media accounts and residents' e-newsletters. We also placed posters in our main offices and other council properties e.g. libraries and

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family hubs and made them available to WBC Councillors to put up in the wards/parishes.

Proposal Background

As a Waste Disposal Authority, West Berkshire Council provides householders within the district access to two Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs) where they can recycle, compost, or dispose of their own household waste.

Our HWRCs are located at:

- Newtown Road, Newbury
- Padworth Lane, Padworth

Both sites are currently open from 9am to 6pm, 7 days a week, 362 days a year (closed on Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Years Day). On Thursdays, between 1 April and 30 September, we offer late night opening at the Newtown Road site from 6pm to 8pm. Both sites have appointment booking system in operation. Appointments can be booked online or by calling our Customer Services team on 01635 551111. Last year 188,347 appointments were made by householders.

Over the past 12 months, 55% of all available appointments have been used. Over the weekend and bank holiday Mondays this increases to 79%. During the last late-night opening period, 60% of available appointments were booked.

Businesses, charities and sole traders are not permitted to dispose of their waste at either of the HWRCs and must arrange a commercial collection.

Householders from outside the district can access both sites by paying an entry fee upon arrival.

Legislation Requirements

Under the Refuse Disposal Amenity Act 1978, Waste Disposal Authorities are required to provide residents with reasonable access to places to dispose of their household waste. There is no requirement on how long HWRCs are open for or the number of facilities that residents have access to.

Proposal Details

- To reduce the weekday (Monday to Friday) opening times, currently 9am to 6pm, of both HWRCs by two hours to 11am to 6pm
- To remove the late-night opening hours (6pm to 8pm - Thursdays only) during the summer months at Newtown Road

Overall, this would create an estimated annual saving of £59,000.

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Consultation Response

Number of Responses

In total, 190 responses were received.

We also received 3 additional written responses from:

- Labour Party, Basildon Parish and Tilehurst Parish Council

Summary of Main Points

The majority of respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the proposals. There was some debate over what the best adjustment to the available opening hours would be, but most respondents seemed to agree that they could make the proposals work for them. Suggestions included opening from 9am - 4pm or 10am - 5pm instead. Concerns were raised that we were making it harder for residents to visit the sites especially those who worked full time and thus could increase fly tipping.

Summary of Responses by Question

1. Which of the following best describe you? Please select all that apply.

	Number	Percentage
A user of the service	158	83.16%
A resident of West Berkshire	161	84.74%
A visitor to West Berkshire	0	0.00%
A West Berkshire business owner	8	4.21%
Employed by a West Berkshire business	11	5.79%
Employed by West Berkshire Council	7	3.68%
A Parish/Town Councillor	9	4.74%
A District Councillor	0	0.00%
A partner organisation	2	1.05%
A West Berkshire Council service provider	0	0.00%
Other	3	1.58%

2. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following proposals?

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- i. To reduce the weekday (Monday to Friday) opening times, currently 9am to 6pm, of both HWRCs by two hours to 11am to 6pm*

	Number	Percentage
Strongly agree	62	33.88
Agree	55	30.05
Neither agree nor disagree	12	6.56
Disagree	24	13.11
Strongly disagree	30	16.39

- ii. To remove the late-night opening hours (6pm to 8pm - Thursdays only) during the summer months at Newtown Road*

	Number	Percentage
Strongly agree	52	28.73
Agree	49	27.07
Neither agree nor disagree	25	13.81
Disagree	34	18.78
Strongly disagree	21	11.6

In response to the question regarding agreement or disagreement with the proposed changes in opening hours at both HWRCs, the predominant feedback indicated that the proposed reduction of weekday opening times by two hours (from 9am to 6pm, to 11am to 6 pm) and the removal of late-night opening hours (6pm to 8pm on Thursdays only) at Newtown Road would have either no or minimal impacts.

Additionally, alternative suggestions for varying opening hours and days were proposed by some respondents who believed it could be more effective. There were individuals expressing a desire to retain the late-night opening hours. Concerns were raised about potential difficulties for residents to visit the sites, possibly leading to increased fly-tipping.

Several minor points were also raised, including concerns about the impact on staff, health and safety issues for staff working in the evening, suggestions to eliminate the booking system, and proposals to increase bulky waste charges. There was also anticipation of longer queues leading to increased pollution, and concerns that the changes might reduce recycling rates.

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3. What do you think we should be aware of in terms of how these proposals might impact people? For example, do you think they will affect particular individuals more than others?

The prevailing view highlighted concerns about the potential impact on workers who might find it challenging to adhere to the proposed opening times. Many respondents expressed the opinion that there would be little to no impact on residents. Additional points raised included the possibility of increased traffic volumes during the evening rush hour, considerations for Veolia staff working at the site, concerns about a potential reduction in recycling rates, and the need for effective communication to mitigate impacts.

Several respondents also expressed worries that the changes could lead to an increase in fly-tipping and suggested potential disparate impacts on retired or ill individuals. It was noted by some that the effects would be widespread, affecting everyone to varying degrees.

4. If the decision is taken to proceed with one of these proposals, do you have any suggestions for how we can reduce the impact on those affected? If so, please provide details.

A diverse range of suggestions emerged. The most suggested approach was to advertise and promote the changes extensively to ensure residents are well-informed. Additional responses included proposals to open another site, implement a priority booking system, maintain the existing booking system, retain late-night opening hours, consider opening six days (instead of the current seven days) a week, and adjust operating hours to 9am – 4pm or 10am – 5pm.

Other suggestions encompassed maintaining the status quo, enhancing kerbside waste collections, eliminating the garden waste charge, reviewing the Veolia contract, introducing a charge per booking slot, redeploying affected staff, introducing more mini recycling centres, reducing staffing levels, improving the efficiency of the site, and exploring variations of the opening hours. Some innovative ideas included having an unmanned section of the site for residents to drop off items when the site is closed and exploring collaboration with Reading Council to utilise their site.

5. Do you see any benefits or opportunities that may arise from these proposed changes? If so, please provide details.

The most prevalent response was a perception that there would be no discernible benefits. However, a notable proportion of respondents identified the potential for the proposed changes to enhance the cost-effectiveness of the sites. Additional responses suggested that it could lead to a reduction in staff costs, contribute to easing morning rush-hour traffic, provide an opportunity to further reduce operational hours, result in overall efficiencies in site management and slot utilisation, and potentially eliminate the existing booking system. Some respondents also anticipated a positive outcome in terms of reducing waste sent to landfill.

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6. Do you have any suggestions on how we might save money or increase income, either in this service, or elsewhere in the council? If so, please provide details.

The most frequently recommended options included reducing WBC management, staff, and overall expenses, as well as exploring the possibility of reducing operating hours at HWRCs. Here is a summarised overview of the suggestions:

Personnel and Management:

- Reduce WBC management, staff, and overall expenses.

Waste Management (HWRCs and Recycling):

- Reduce operating hours at HWRCs.
- Increase mini HWRCs.
- Introduce charges for HWRC slots and commercial waste.
- Eliminate the food waste service.
- Increase bulky waste charges.
- Retain the garden waste charge.
- Implement ANPR to monitor vehicles at the HWRC.

Infrastructure and Utilities:

- Make road repairs last longer.
- Turn off street lights.

Administrative Efficiency:

- Less printing.
- Review all discretionary spending.

Income Generation:

- Sell things.
- Sell compost.
- Start a reuse shop.
- Charge for HGVs in town.
- Explore privatisation of certain services.
- Use volunteers more effectively.

Transportation and Planning:

- Increase kerbside recycling.
- Establish a reuse shop.
- Stop putting in unnecessary cycle lanes.

Financial Measures:

- Become a unitary authority.
- Increase Council Tax.
- Sell unused property.

Miscellaneous:

- Scrap the booking system.
- Don't sell off property.
- Stop putting in unnecessary cycle lanes.
- Privatised services.
- Discontinue discounted bus travel.

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- Reduce spending on consultants.
- Reduce grass cutting.
- Discontinue security services at Four Houses Corner.

7. If you, your community group, or organisation think you might be able to help reduce the impact of these proposals, if the decision is taken to proceed with one of them, please provide your contact details below.

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8. Any further comments?

Additional comments encompassed a variety of suggestions. Some respondents proposed variations in the opening hours, advocating for in-house cost reductions, and recommending the expansion of kerbside and mini recycling centres. Others suggested the establishment of reuse shops, introducing charges for commercial waste, improving communication, and enhancing staff efficiency by optimising the use of ANPR technology. Further recommendations included discontinuing charges for DIY waste, conducting a trial period for reduced operating hours, and offering voluntary redundancy to staff affected.

Officer conclusion and recommendation can be found in the associated Overview of Responses and Recommendations document.

Daniel Warne
Waste Manager
Environment
18/01/2024

Please note: *In order to allow everyone who wished the opportunity to contribute, feedback was not sampled. Therefore this wasn't a quantitative, statistically valid exercise. It was neither the premise, purpose, nor within the capability of the exercise, to determine the overall community's level of support, or views on the proposals, with any degree of confidence.*

The feedback captured therefore should be seen in the context of 'those who responded', rather than reflective of the wider community.

ⁱ <https://www.westberks.gov.uk/balancing-our-budget>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.westberks.gov.uk/consultations>